Non-formal education, personhood, and the corrosive power of neoliberalism

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The aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which non-formal education is being corroded by neoliberal values. Given non-formal education is frequently used to develop young people's notions of citizenship, and that non-formal education providers are increasingly forced to operate within the free-market paradigm, it is significant to consider what forms of personhood are being championed. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and observations with coaches and young people from a youth sports charity in the UK. Focusing on a core aspect of non-formal education – caring relationships (as understood by Nel Noddings and Carl Rogers) – the findings suggest that the quality of coaches' care for young people was conditioned by the extent to which adolescents re-shaped their personhood to align with neoliberal values of individual responsibility and discipline. Thus, the meanings of 'care' and 'good citizenship' were corroded by a neoliberal rationality.

Keywords: non-formal education, personhood, neoliberalism, care, young people, charities.

Introduction

Non-formal education (NFE) refers to any type of organised education with learning objectives that falls beyond the remit of formal education[1] (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). As such, NFE is a diverse field with settings that can range from youth community groups, museums, and sports clubs through to religious gatherings, art clubs, or gardening groups.

[1] Formal education encompasses "highly institutionalised, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured" (Coombes and Ahmed, 1974, p. 8) systems like school.

This breadth of scope is one of the key reasons why non-formal education has grown over the last five decades into a 'worldwide education industry' (Romi & Schmida, 2009, p. 257). By emphasising voluntary participation, frequently being fuelled by a learner's intrinsic motivation, and taking place in spaces where learning is often not evaluated (Eshach, 2007), non-formal education increasingly emerges as an alternative or complement to the limitations of formal education. Whilst spaces like schools and universities appear to be conditioned by a neoliberal performativity matrix (Brown, 2010; Carr, 2016; Lorenz, 2012), non-formal education – given it emphasises less hierarchical and more caring relationships (Madjar & Cohen-Malayev, 2013) – seems suited to address the pitfalls of formal education.

However, non-formal education does not operate in isolation from the socio-political landscape. Several authors have suggested how non-formal education providers, such as charities or NGOs, are increasingly being re-imagined in neoliberal terms (Costas Batlle, Carr, & Brown, 2017; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). Given there is a growing trend for NFE programmes to instil notions of citizenship and personhood in young people (Madjar & Cohen-Malayev, 2013; O'Connor, 2012; Romi & Schmida, 2009; Yasunaga, 2014), it is imperative to explore the extent to which non-formal education is being re-shaped, or even 'hijacked', by neoliberal values. That is the aim of this paper.

By drawing on qualitative data from a provider of non-formal education (a youth sports charity in the UK), I argue how caring relationships (as one of the central elements of NFE, and outlined using the works of Nel Noddings and Carl Rogers) is subtly being 'warped' to align with neoliberal rationalities. The implications of this 'corrosion' are significant when considering young people's conceptualisations of citizenship for two reasons. Firstly, there is a risk that experiencing a 'warped' caring relationship can lead to internalising, and replicating, a neoliberal understanding of care. Secondly, by

deploying this ‘neoliberal’ care, there is scope for young people to uncritically assimilate neoliberal values and thus develop a form of personhood akin to Foucault's (2008) *homo oeconomicus* or Kelly's (2006) *Entrepreneurial Self*.

Literature Review

Neoliberalism

Non-formal education does not exist in a vacuum; it operates within socio-political landscapes which, in the UK (and many parts of the world), could be described as neoliberal. At its core, neoliberalism assumes that human life can best advance if it operates within a free market framework (Harvey, 2005). Considered a particularly extreme revival of classical liberalism (Thorsen, 2010), neoliberalism champions an ‘economic logic’ which Lorenz (2012, p. 601) describes via the formula

> *‘free market = competition = best value for money = optimum efficiency for individuals as both consumers and owners of private property’*

Akin to how the animal kingdom regulates itself through survival of the fittest, the market should be free of any external force (such as the state) which attempts to stunt or shape its development (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Consequently, the free market paradigm establishes a ‘survival of the fittest’ doctrine where ‘fitness’ and ‘strength’ are determined by succeeding in the eyes of the market through the accumulation of financial capital (Rose & Miller, 2010).

Neoliberalism operates by re-configuring all aspects of society into an ‘enterprise society’ (Lazzarato, 2009), including domains which traditionally do not lend themselves to functioning as businesses, such as education or healthcare. Formal education organisations, like schools and universities, are increasingly being re-shaped to operate

as businesses (Sam Carr, 2016; Lorenz, 2012); a trend which non-formal education providers like charities (Buckingham, 2009; Costas Batlle et al., 2017) are also following.

The hallmarks of this 'businessification' are an emphasis on individual responsibility (Harvey, 2005) and competition (Giroux, 2005). Neoliberalism understands citizenship as a form of entrepreneurialism whereby people should strive to make the right choices to improve and better themselves (Foucault, 2008; Kelly, 2017). According to this logic, socio-economically disadvantaged young people are assumed to be poor due to a combination of their flawed character and poor life choices (Harvey, 2007). Consequently, through a neoliberal rationality, socio-economically disadvantaged young people are assumed to require 'fixing' (McInerney & Smyth, 2015) through encouraging them to model individual responsibility and discipline without considering the contextual factors affecting a young person's life (Kelly, 2011).

Several commentators (Carr & Costas Batlle, 2015; Martin & McLellan, 2013; Sugarman, 2015) have addressed the 'corrosive' power of neoliberalism in terms of how it appears to re-shape what education *is* or what it means to be a 'good human being'. This corrosion has gradually taken place because neoliberalism has established accountability and individual responsibility as the 'common sense' ideology underpinning all spheres of life (Martínez-Rodríguez & Fernández-Herrería, 2017). Given non-formal education operates within the social structures of a neoliberal landscape, and that one of its central concerns is the development of young people's personhood, it is necessary to carefully interrogate the extent to which NFE may be succumbing to neoliberal corrosion.

Non-formal education

Non-formal education emerged in the 1960s as a response to a changing educational landscape which required a greater emphasis on out-of-school learning (La Belle, 1982;

Rogers, 2005). Whilst Coombs and Ahmed's (1974) definition of NFE refers to organised activities that fall beyond the domain of formal education (such as school or university), several authors (e.g. Rogers, 2005; Romi & Schmida, 2009) suggest NFE is a nebulous term. This vagueness stems from 1) the difficulty of defining NFE without invoking a comparison with formal education, 2) how NFE is often used interchangeably with informal education, and 3) NFE can encompass a wide array of spaces.

Despite the conceptual breadth of non-formal education, research indicates NFE settings share a series of common characteristics. Eshach (2007) highlights how participation in non-formal education is often voluntary and driven by intrinsic motivation, whilst Willems (2015) outlines how non-formal education providers tend to focus on niche activities aimed at supporting particular sub-groups of the population. A further central characteristic is that NFE spaces foster more egalitarian and less hierarchical relationships between adults and youth (Madjar & Cohen-Malayev, 2013; Taylor, 2006). As a result of the above components, non-formal education enjoys a greater degree of flexibility than formal education (Morgan, Morgan, & Kelly, 2008), allowing NFE to develop programmes and methods which are more emergent and based on young people's needs (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi, 2015).

These characteristics – particularly the notion that NFE appears well equipped to address young people's needs – are reflected in a diverse body of non-formal education literature. These works include examining the links between NFE and enhancing both employment (Souto-Otero, 2016) and awareness about health issues (Pais, Rodrigues, & Menezes, 2014), as well as exploring how NFE spaces can be valuable learning sites (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi, 2015). Further research has also investigated provision of NFE for disadvantaged or vulnerable young people across extra-curricular activities (Mahoney

& Cairns, 1997), sport interventions (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Coalter, 2012), or youth movements to combat violence (Ardizzone, 2003).

The importance of providing flexible, caring, and more egalitarian environments for young people is arguably one of the fundamental reasons behind non-formal education's popularity. Comparatively, formal education struggles to foster environments where deep and meaningful relationships can flourish (Ball, 2000; Pianta & Walsh, 2013). NFE, therefore, increasingly emerges as a positive alternative or complement to formal education which can be used to "develop human capabilities, improve social cohesion and to create responsible future citizens" (Yasunaga, 2014, p. 5). Though there are a range of elements which could be explored in the study of non-formal education, I will focus on one component: relationships.

Relationships: Care and Unconditional Positive Regard

Relationships are an important aspect of non-formal education youth programmes given said meaningful relationships are about 'spending time with caring adults and with other young people' (Quinn, 1999, p. 97). Since meeting young people's needs is a key goal of NFE, Pringle (1980) argues relationships can satisfy the needs for love, physical care and affection. Therefore, care matters because it is about 'seeing and responding to need […] so that no-one is left alone' (Gilligan, 1993, p. 62). The value of care and meaningful relationships, beyond their intrinsic worth, is that they can support young people as they navigate through the turbulent waters of adolescence (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, Jr., & Verma, 2002) *en route* to developing their personhood. Though there are a myriad of manners in which relationships can be conceptualised, I will focus on Noddings' (2013) ethics of care and Rogers' (1957) unconditional positive regard.

For Noddings (2007), care is a genuine and spontaneous behaviour whereby 'the motive to care in many situations arises on its own; it does not have to be summoned' (p. 222). As a relational process, Noddings (2003, 2007) argues care should be envisaged as bottom-up and non-prescriptive. However, care is not about unconditionally loving everyone (since that would be a prescriptive universal principle); instead, as Sevenhuijsen (1998) indicates, care entails accepting 'otherness' and difference as a way to co-exist with those around us. This co-existence can take place if it is underpinned by an understanding of caring relationships characterised by three elements: engrossment, action, and reciprocity (Noddings, 2013). Engrossment entails taking an authentic interest in the life of another, whilst action refers to care being fuelled by intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008) rather than an external reward (such as a pay-check or receiving public credit). Finally, reciprocity is about enabling the unconstrained and spontaneous reaction by the cared-for to the one-caring's actions.

The value of Noddings' formulation of care is greater than the sum of its three constituent parts; its value resides in the implications it has on personhood and citizenship. Teaching themes of care encourages young people to ask existential questions (such as 'how should I live?') as well as promoting relationships with others with a view to collectively generate new knowledge (Noddings, 1995). Thus, caring relationships enable non-formal education settings 'to move beyond safe spaces, to become developmental spaces that may promote prosocial norms and the developmental needs of youth' (Jones & Deutsch, 2011, p. 1402).

Echoing Noddings' (2013) understanding of care as a genuine behaviour is Rogers' (1957) formulation of unconditional positive regard. Akin to how Sevenhuijsen (1998) argues care is about accepting differences, unconditional positive regard 'means that there are no *conditions* of acceptance, no feeling of "I like you only *if* you are thus

and so"' [italics in original] (Rogers, 1957, p. 98). Contrary to *un*conditional positive regard is *conditional* positive regard, whereby the level of care offered depends on the extent to which a person conforms to another's expectations (Kanat-Maymon, Roth, Assor, & Raizer, 2016). Whilst conditional positive regard may be considered as an adequate foundation for a relationship by offering greater levels of care as a way to reinforce certain behaviours, several authors (Assor, Roth, & Edward, 2004; Assor & Tal, 2012; Kanat-Maymon, Argaman, & Roth, 2017) have highlighted its emotional pitfalls. These include reduced self-esteem, resentment of feeling controlled, and unhealthy coping mechanisms. As such, the extent to which non-formal education promotes unconditional or conditional positive regard can influence the form of personhood young people internalise.

Methodology

Research Design: A case study of a charity

To explore the provision of non-formal education I undertook a qualitative case study of UK youth sports charity: SportHelp. Whilst the confines of my case were delineated by the boundaries of SportHelp as an organisation, the phenomena I studied within the case (Stake, 2005) centred on the charity's youth sport programmes. This entailed interviewing four coaches, six young people, and conducting participant observations of 22 coaching sessions.

SportHelp is based in the South East of the UK. Their mission is to improve young people's lives through sport by aiming to instil life skills (pro-social attitudes and behaviours) within socio-economically disadvantaged young people (aged 8-18). The organisation is over a decade old, and has grown from offering a single sport program in

a school to engaging over 7,000 young people across 30 different schools. Instead of establishing community hubs or clubs, SportHelp coaches are based within schools in socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Within these schools, the coaches (often experts in a single sport) run sessions before school, during school, after school, and at weekends. Therefore, the programmes and coaches' salaries are partly subsidised by SportHelp[2], and partly paid by each school. Through this arrangement, coaches are line managed by the charity, but are integrated into the school community and PE departments. Thus, SportHelp provides non-formal education within a formal education space.

My sample comprised four coaches and six young people. Once I gained access to SportHelp, I first recruited the coaches using purposive sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). I aimed for a gender split representative of SportHelp's coaches (3:1 male female ratio), a mixture of team and individual sports, a diversity of ethnicities, and coaches who had spent more than a year with SportHelp. After recruiting the coaches, they helped me recruit young people on their programmes. Again, I sought a representative gender split (4:1 male female ratio) and a range of ethnicities (reflecting the charity's service users). The table below (Table 1) describes my participants, which in some cases did not fully meet the criteria I aimed for:

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[2] SportHelp's financial and administrative approach has changed since its inception. At the start, the charity relied on the economic generosity of private donors who were either on the board of trustees or had close ties to the organisation's founder. As the charity grew, it began attracting increasing amount of pro-bono work from major banks and consultancy firms. Currently, SportHelp's fundraising model targets a range of revenue streams, such as government funding, national governing body funding, or individual donations.

Coach (Ethnicity, Gender)	Sport	Time with SportHelp	Young people (Ethnicity, Gender)	Age
Karl (Black British, male)	Basketball	17 months	H. (Egyptian, male)	16
			Tia (Black British, female)	15
Vincent (White British, male)	Basketball	6 years	Fish (Black African, male)	14
			Orange (White Other, male)	15
Jake (Other White, male)	Table tennis	10 years	Carys (Mixed, female)	13
			Mitch (Mixed, male)	13
Alfred (Other White, male)	Table tennis	3 years		

Table 1. A summary of the participants in the study.

Data collection and analysis

Qualitative data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews and participant observations. This combination of qualitative methods helped me gather an understanding of the interplay between phenomena and actors (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2012), thus allowing me to generate a more trustworthy account (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) of how SportHelp offered non-formal education.

Each coach and young person was interviewed once (except in the case of Orange and Fish, who were interviewed together via an impromptu focus group). These 10 semi-structured interviews lasted on average 30 minutes in the case of the young people, and 70 minutes for the coaches. The aim of these interviews was to explore how coaches and young people engage with each other in the charity's sport programmes. Data from the interviews were captured using a digital recorder, and were subsequently transcribed for analysis.

After the interviews, I conducted participant observations of 22 coaching sessions (x10 with Vincent, x10 with Jake, and x2 with Karl). The duration of each observation spanned between an hour and a half and two hours. Throughout the sessions, I followed

Werner and Schoepfle's (1987) advice of engaging in the different activities of observing, participating in the session, and having short, informal conversations with participants. Akin to the purpose of the semi-structured interviews, the participant observation enabled me to simultaneously look at how coaches delivered non-formal education and how young people 'received' this provision. During the sessions I took 'cryptic jottings' in a note-book (Berg, 2007) which I developed into more comprehensive notes after each observation.

To ensure data were collected ethically, I first requested access to the charity through two of the charity's senior managers. Subsequently, I provided coaches with informed consent forms, and, in turn, provided young people I interviewed with these same consent forms. Given the young people were underage participants, I required both their consent and their parents'. However, I only sought the assent (Greig, Taylor, & Mackay, 2007) of the remaining youths who would be part of the participant observations by introducing myself at the start of the first few sessions, and briefly informing them about myself and the project. In addition to following safeguarding policies – such as interviewing a young person whilst in sight of another adult – I also protected my participants' identities (including the charity's) by using pseudonyms.

I analysed the semi-structured interviews and participant observations using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By taking a theory-driven approach and relying on the works of Noddings (2013) and Rogers (1957), my goal was to generate in-depth themes (rather than superficial ones) which unearthed latent meanings. Unto this end, I firstly analysed the interview data drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. Once I had coded the transcripts and generated preliminary themes (phases 1 to 4), I subsequently analysed my participant observations using the preliminary themes I had identified as a starting point. Phase 5 ('defining and naming themes') entailed

drawing the themes from both the interviews and observations into two overarching themes: 1) 'caring relationships: engrossment, action and reciprocity', and 2) 'the neoliberal corrosion of care'.

Results

Caring relationships: engrossment, action and reciprocity

The theme of caring relationships encompasses the extent to which the coaches demonstrated and modelled caring behaviours towards the young people on their programmes, and, in turn, the positive reactions this care evoked in the youths. Echoing the non-formal education literature, these relationships were more egalitarian and less hierarchical (Madjar & Cohen-Malayev, 2013). In turn, these caring relationships served as a conduit through which coaches – who saw themselves as mentors – could affect young people's personhood. As Coach Vincent indicated,

> *'Not only are we seeing them in the mornings, and the afternoons, and the evenings for games and things like that, we see them at lunch time, we see them through the day, we are in and out of their lessons. There is a lot of contact that we have and they have with us, throughout any working day. We can really tap in and mentor them from that perspective*'

In addition to the coaches viewing themselves as mentors, the young people saw themselves as mentees whose lives were shaped by their coaches:

> *'Coach* [Vincent] *is like a mentor to me. You know, sometimes you can tell if someone wants you to succeed in life. I can tell coach wants me to succeed'* (Fish).

> *"A mentor and a friend at the same time. He* [Coach Vincent] *guides me a lot. If it wasn't for him… I mean… I wouldn't be disciplined. It reflects to your life, as well, the things coach teaches you. He teaches you to respect your parents, value your education…"* (Orange).

> *'Some things I mainly learned from him* [Coach Karl] *is to just humble myself,* […] *and just be… just be a… you know, a good man'* (H.).

These quotes reflect one of Noddings' (2013) three dimensions of care: engrossment. The coaches took an active interest in young people's lives, and the young people *felt* this genuine interest. Since SportHelp operates within a school setting, the young people I interviewed frequently drew comparisons between their coaches and teachers:

> *'Some teachers, they just don't care as much. Some are "you respect me, I teach you" sort of thing. It wasn't "you respect me, I respect you", it was "respect me, I teach you. That's it"'* (Carys).

Alfred, a table tennis coach, highlighted one of the significant ways coaches demonstrated caring dispositions towards young people:

> *'But I know a lot of the situations that the only thing you need is somebody to listen to you. Sometimes I don't have to say anything, I just sit down for twenty minutes, this is happening, and they say OK. Sometimes I ask "what do you want me to do?" "I don't want you to do anything, just listen". Sometimes I don't play table tennis'.*

The engrossment coaches demonstrated in young people's lives coalesced with the second of Noddings' (2013) characteristics for care: action. The coaches visibly made efforts to support and nurture young people's development. These efforts were well

received by the young people, and they once again served as a point of differentiation between coaches and teachers. For instance, Vincent and Karl outlined how, despite being basketball coaches, they had started attending adolescents' classes to support young people who were having behavioural or academic difficulties:

> *'If they don't want to play, we have other ways in which we can help them. One being that sometimes, in the past, I've gone into classrooms, rather than the kid just coming to play basketball. I'll actually go into the student's lesson and sit with them, and mentor them, in an academic lesson'* (Vincent).

> *'Some of them* [other coaches] *will think "why am I going to a classroom, I'm a basketball coach". I think, you know, the kids are benefiting from me going into the class, that's my favourite part of what I do at the moment because I am getting good results'* (Karl).

The young people recognised these visible efforts. Orange was particularly vocal about the difference between his coach and teachers, emphasising how caring actions entailed going 'above and beyond':

> *'The difference between teachers and coach is that teachers, even when they try to get on a level with you, have that connection, it is never going to be the same as coach. Coach… he will do things out of his own time. Teachers are always getting paid. They are here, they are getting paid. When they do extra break duties, they are getting more money. For them, it is all about the money. Coach, he actually cares about you. As a person'* (Orange).

Echoing Orange's sentiments, Carys also linked meaningful care to her coach visibly sacrificing his own time for the benefit of the young people he worked with:

> *'I used to think… some people in my class are rude to teachers, and teachers would be like 'I spent a lot of time preparing to teach you', and I would always think 'well you are getting paid to be here, that's the only reason you're kind of here'. And then, I kind of used to think that about* [Coach] *Jake, "it's your job, you need to come here to get paid", and then, and then, when I got invited to like tournament, I started to be like "he didn't have to be here, he could be with his son", or, especially, I think it was the communion of his cousin, and instead of being there, he came to the tournament with us, cos it was quite important, and then… it put a lot of respect for Jake. He put us first'* (Carys).

The engrossment and action the coaches showed for young people was compounded by youths' demonstrating reciprocity – Noddings' third and final component of caring relationships. Reciprocity entailed the young people *wanting* to show affection for their coach's care. They did so by eulogising their coaches when they spoke of them as 'mentors', 'friends', and pivotal figures in their lives who had developed their personhood and helped them become better people. This was reflected in youths being comfortable considering their coaches as pseudo-parental figures who had an important bearing on their lives:

> *'Erm, and, a part from my mom, to me he actually comes above my dad. He's been there more for me than my actual dad has been. He's like a father figure to me, if you know what I mean. I'd put him on par with my parents'* (Orange).

> *'It's almost like… he's almost like a third parent, in a way, like my uncle or something, cos he's just really helpful*' (Carys).

> *'Just below my parents. Mmmhhmmm. He's changed my life. If I'm being honest with you… I think I said this already. If it wasn't for him, I don't know where I'd be. I have no clue where I'd be'* (Fish).

Whilst previous work has suggested that coaches *may* fulfil parental attachment roles (Davis & Jowett, 2010), intimating that coaches can act as parents is contentious given the complexity of attachment bonds. Nevertheless, the above quotes are indicative of how much young people enjoyed the caring relationships. This satisfaction – reciprocity – was also espoused by the coaches:

> *'They like being here. They see a purpose. This is linear to what the situation that we struggle in our society.* […] *They like being here, they see a purpose to being here*' (Alfred).

> *'Funny enough, the kids that some of teachers think are nightmares, I think are angels when they come to my sessions'* (Karl).

> *'I suppose in many ways, the kids that come to our SportHelp programs, as out of school hours, they want to be there, they are committed to be there, they enjoy being there, so behaviour is never really an issue'* (Vincent).

Therefore, the theme of caring relationships, in line with previous work on non-formal youth settings (Slovenko & Thompson, 2016), captured how coaches cared for young people by demonstrating engrossment and action, which in turn encouraged adolescents to show joyful reciprocity for their coaches' care.

The neoliberal corrosion of care

The second theme refers to how the care outlined in the previous theme was corroded by neoliberal values of individual responsibility and discipline. Whilst Noddings (2013) and

Rogers (1957) argue that care and relationships should be *un*conditional; the care SportHelp coaches offered was *conditional* on young people re-shaping their personhood to align with neoliberal understandings of citizenship. This entailed youths' appreciating that 'good personhood' and 'being worthy of care' was tied to the extent to which they internalised values of individual responsibility and discipline. Such an internalisation was enforced by coaches promoting or limiting young people's access to their sport programmes, which effectively meant acting as gatekeepers to 1) a community of peers and 2) caring relationships with an adult. Tia captured the extent to which she had to model individual responsibility and discipline (i.e. re-shape her personhood) to continue playing basketball:

> *'If I misbehave in school, they're going to take basketball away from me. Does that make sense?* […] *Yeah, so… now, as a person, I behave *so* well in class, and I'm doing really well in basketball.* […] *Calling out, arguing with teachers, unnecessary bickering… which is now all gone'* (Tia).

Fish and Orange both reflected on the importance of individual responsibility and discipline as the markers of 'good personhood', and how, by extension, peers who had not internalised those values embodied a questionable form of citizenship:

> *'In year 8, I realized that discipline is kind of a big thing, and, I don't know… it shows you are a good person. You know what is good, and what is bad'* (Fish).

> *'I mean, from training I've learnt to keep myself calm. When coach shouts at me, like, if I wasn't disciplined, I'd probably shout back. I knew someone that did'* (Orange).

The conditionality of coaches' care for adolescents became apparent during one of my observations with Coach Jake. Whilst we were waiting in the school hallway, Gustav (a young boy who Jake claimed had a history of poor social skills) approached Jake to request one-to-one table tennis sessions. When Jake responded he was too busy that week, Gustav – without saying a word – turned around and walked away. Jake erupted, and despite being in front of other young people, exclaimed that no matter how much he attempts to work with Gustav, Gustav's attitude was not progressing and thus he was likely to be dropped from the programme. This emphasis on individual responsibility, without considering contextual factors which could shape Gustav's behaviour (Kelly, 2011), was further discussed by Fish in relation to how Coach Vincent 'avoids trouble' when encouraging young people to play basketball:

> *'I think that's the question… about, like, does he* [Coach Vincent] *persuade people to come practice? That's why I said, he avoids trouble. If you wanna go training, go training and stay committed. He likes committed people. Some people are on and off. You can't really be on and off. You have to stick to it or let go'* (Fish).

Orange echoed Fish's comments emphasising how Coach Vincent's care for people was tied to youths' internalisation of individual responsibility and discipline:

> *'Like this guy, was really rude. He'd always get detentions. He was unorganized. He was undisciplined. Coach* [Vincent] *tried to work with him. Occasionally, he will try to bring in these kinds of people. The second it starts to become an actual distraction to us, it's like the referral system in school. If someone starts to become too much of a distraction in school, like, he won't like, concentrate on them. He won't say "come to training".* […] *The second that person stopped trying themselves… you can't force them to try'*.

The allusion to ‘these kinds of people’ is particularly noteworthy in that it demarcates the difference, in Orange’s mind, between ‘good personhood’ (characterised by the capacity to manage and regulate oneself - Khoja-Moolji, 2014) and ‘bad citizenship’. Coach Karl further outlined the importance of individual responsibility and discipline, and the expectation that young people would internalise discipline and good behaviour as a precursor to receiving further care or support from coaches:

> *‘I was calling his parents, I was talking to his brother, I was trying everything, contacting his friends… but, he just didn’t want to help himself. And if he doesn’t want to help himself, I can’t help him at all. It’s tough. I tried other stuff to get through, but I just couldn’t. He shut down every door’.*

Thus, the care coaches provided for young people was *conditional* on young people willingly internalising, and demonstrating, neoliberal values of individual responsibility and discipline. One of the methods coaches used to promote such values was conditional regard, whereby particular behaviours would be rewarded or punished as a way of ‘caring’ and ‘developing’ young people (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2017). For instance, Coach Karl would prioritise access to the basketball court to those who demonstrated responsibility whilst working on their fitness when the court was unavailable. Similarly, Orange explained how Coach Vincent enacted conditional regard:

> *‘When we were clapping up to go into the circle and give our feedback, we were like “why aren’t you coming?” and he was “coach didn’t ask me”. He’ll* [Coach Vincent] *make you feel separated, so you don’t do that thing again. He’s trying to make you a better person. He* [Coach Vincent] *still cares about him, but not as much as other people, like if someone is bad too much’.*

In sum, coaches used non-formal education to instil neoliberal notions of personhood by emphasising individual responsibility and discipline. They achieved this by re-configuring 'care' from an *un*conditional to a *conditional* process. As such, young people internalised a 'corroded' conceptualisation of care, relative to Noddings' (2013) and Rogers' (1957) understandings of care. Adolescents came to comprehend that they were 'worthy' of care *depending* on the extent to which they modelled individual responsibility and discipline.

Discussion

The findings suggest SportHelp coaches engaged in deep and meaningful caring relationships with young people, however, the quality and availability of these relationships was contingent on the extent to which young people willingly re-shaped their personhood to align with neoliberal values. These results indicate that, just as neoliberalism has 'infiltrated' formal education (Carr, 2016), it can also 'hijack' non-formal education and one of the core aspects of NFE: relationships. Given the emphasis on non-formal education as a space that "ensures the full-fledged and comprehensive self-development of each student's personality" (Ivanova, 2016, p. 725), my findings are in line with how Read (2009) and Sugarman (2015) argue that the 'corrosive' power of neoliberalism is re-shaping what it means to be a human being.

Relationships are central to personhood development. Noddings (2005, p. 1), argues care is the 'foundation for successful pedagogical activity' whilst Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory posits that social interactions during infancy have a direct bearing on our development. Likewise, Deci and Ryan (2014) cite meaningful relationships as a basic human need. The value of having access to meaningful relationships was frequently highlighted by the young people in my study – they eulogized their coaches, considered them pseudo-parental figures, and basked in learning how to become better people from

them. These adolescents felt their coaches cared for them in ways teachers did not, because the coaches appeared to fulfil Noddings' (2013) requirements for engrossment, action, and reciprocity. Given the centrality of relationships to non-formal education, this result echoes the work of Macleod, Fyfe, Nicol, Sangster, and Obeng (2017, p. 10) who suggested that 'one person does as another asks because he/she believes that the person doing the asking both knows what is in his/her best interests *and* cares about him/her' (italics in original).

However, the assumption that coaches 'knew' what is in the young people's best interests was never critically considered. Coaches embodied an approach towards shaping youths' personhood reminiscent of UK social policy: a 'deficit model' (Smith, Lister, Middleton, & Cox, 2005). This 'deficit model' is anchored in the neoliberal assumption that socio-economically disadvantaged young people are in need of having their deficits 'fixed' (Coakley, 2016) by promoting an entrepreneurial approach to life. SportHelp coaches emphasised individual responsibility and discipline as the hallmarks of 'good personhood', ensuring the young people appreciated that *they* were responsible for the 'Do It Yourself (DIY) project of the self' (Kelly, 2017, p. 58).

Young people quickly realised that access to caring relationships was conditional on the extent to which they modelled individual responsibility and discipline. In doing so, their notions of 'good personhood' increasingly aligned with neoliberal understandings of citizenship, such as *homo oeconomicus* (Foucault, 2008) or the *entreprenerual Self* (Kelly, 2006). This conditionality is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it reduces care from being universal (Noddings, 2013; Rogers, 1957) to a 'reward' that can be enjoyed *by those who deserve it*. Secondly, it promotes a 'warped' understanding of care which, if internalised, could be applied to other spheres of young people's lives.

In the first instance, the meaning of Noddings' and Rogers' conceptualisations of care was corroded to align with the neoliberal value of individual responsibility and discipline. For both authors, the unconditional nature of caring relationships is fundamental to the development of strong interpersonal connections because it 'gives consistency to an individual's self' (Conradson, 2003, p. 521). By altering the nature of what care *is*, SportHelp promoted an understanding of care which, whilst retaining the elements of engrossment, action, and reciprocity, is nevertheless primarily associated to accountability. This is one of the hallmarks of the corrosive power of neoliberalism (Martínez-Rodríguez & Fernández-Herrería, 2017). Thus, young people appeared to internalise care as something one should work for and merit. In other words, since meaningful relationships are likely to enhance one's well-being, a good neoliberal citizen should make choices (such as model individual responsibility and discipline) that enhances their well-being (Khoja-Moolji, 2014).

It is worth clarifying that there is nothing inherently disagreeable about individual responsibility and discipline. What is problematic is that neoliberalism conceptualises responsibility and discipline as attributes divorced from a person's historical or social context. Furthermore, there is also an issue with neoliberalism's understandings of individual responsibility and discipline as both the key redeeming features of personhood, and the basis on which care should (or should not) be provided. As Kelly (2006) argues, responsibility and discipline are 'not necessarily the most appropriate markers of who it is that we should become' (p. 30). Other characteristics, such as care or critical thinking, should be equally valuable components of personhood.

The second reason why the conditionality of care is problematic is because it engenders a 'warped' understanding of care. If internalised by young people, this

'corroded' conceptualisation is likely to apply to other spheres of youths' lives, as Orange hinted when talking about his teammate Fish:

> *'Fish here, coach really likes him, because he's always organised, he's a good kid, most of the time, and he might have an off day once or twice. But there are certain kids who are, like, part of the team… they don't really learn from their mistakes, they'll just keep doing the same thing over and over, and that's why he has a closer relationship to me and Fish to some other people'.*

The conditionality of care – learning from one's mistakes, as Orange put it – is what Rogers (1957) calls conditional regard. This conditional regard can be positive (more care is afforded when a carer's expectations are met) or negative (less care is provided when a carer's expectations are not met) (Assor & Tal, 2012). Coaches modelled forms of both positive and negative conditional regard as a way of 'caring' for young people and helping them become 'better' citizens. However, conditional regard has been associated to stressful coping mechanisms (Assor & Tal, 2012) and negative affective consequences like fluctuations in self-esteem or resentment towards caring figures (Assor et al., 2004). The danger of internalising such a 'corroded' understanding of care is that it can shape other and future relationships, such as romantic ones. Works by Kanat-Maymon et al., (2017, 2016) have highlighted how relationships underpinned by conditional regard are harmful to the quality of these relationships because offering more or less care depending on whether expectations are met constitutes a controlling behaviour that diminishes the basic need for autonomy. Thus, by internalising an understanding of care as conditional on another person's accountability, the adolescents on SportHelp's programmes are at risk of hampering the quality of relationships they develop with people in their surroundings.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the extent to which non-formal education is being 'hijacked' by neoliberal values. By focusing on a core aspect of NFE, relationships, I have outlined how the charity SportHelp promoted caring relationships with young people as long as these adolescents demonstrated individual responsibility and discipline. In doing so, the charity encouraged young people to re-shape their personhood to align with neoliberal notions of citizenship and accountability.

Whilst there is nothing wrong *per se* with developing individual responsibility and discipline (as I have already suggested), McCuaig (2012) reminds us that it is dangerous to develop young people's personhood in accordance with an ethos that has been selected for them. Alternative forms of citizenship that eschew the neoliberal paradigm encompass characteristics such as becoming empowered to effect positive change in our communities (Freire, 2003), as well as promoting dialogic learning and collaborative ventures (Martínez-Rodríguez & Fernández-Herrería, 2017). These other forms of citizenship also include fostering creativity and inner diversity (Gordon & O'Toole, 2015), and, of course, becoming caring citizens who embody engrossment, action, and reciprocity (Noddings, 2013) twinned with unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957). Consequently, it is important to attend to Hoppers' (2006) call to study non-formal education within the wider socio-political context and to explore issues such 'whom do the initiatives serve? […] And for what purpose?' (p. 16).

The implications of addressing these questions are closely tied to social justice. Given there is no longer a common provider of youth services in the UK (McGimpsey, 2018) and that, instead, key non-formal education providers such as charities are increasingly pressurised into competing for funds and re-sculpting themselves in the image of the market (Buckingham, 2009; Costas Batlle et al., 2017; Thorpe & Rinehart,

2013), we must carefully interrogate how a range of organisations provide non-formal education within the current neoliberal socio-political landscape. This is particularly critical if 1) non-formal education continues to grow at the current rate and 2) NFE continues to be used to help adolescents shape their personhood (Romi & Schmida, 2009).

Though my research suggests neoliberalism can corrode caring relationships and non-formal education, it is important to recognise that NFE also functions as an important site of resistance to neoliberal values. Equally, it remains a space where meaningful relationships can flourish. NFE's flexible nature, unlike how formal education is caught in a performativity matrix, enables practitioners and service users in non-formal education settings to exercise greater agency and resistance. Consequently, my thesis is not one of 'doom and gloom', but rather a call to be vigilant and protect non-formal education as a space where unconditional care can blossom.

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